DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 355 219 SP 034 374

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TITLE Nurturing Reflective Teachers: A Collaborative Effort between a College and School District.
PUB DATE Feb 93
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (45th, San Diego, CA, February 24-27, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Beginning Teachers; *College School Cooperation; Educational Practices; Elementary Secondary Education; *Faculty Development; Higher Education; Inservice Teacher Education; *Mentors; *Participant Satisfaction; Program Design; *Program Effectiveness; School Districts; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Effectiveness
IDENTIFIERS *Reflective Teaching; West Georgia College

ABSTRACT

In 1990, a county school district in the metropolitan Atlanta area collaborated with West Georgia College's School of Education to equip experienced teachers with the skills necessary to nurture new teachers to become more reflective and to share in cooperative learning. A study was conducted to examine teachers' perceptions of the program and of how well it was working in their school. A questionnaire was administered to mentor teachers participating in the first 2 years of the program. Data were analyzed and compared to determine any significant changes in perceptions since the program's inception. Qualitative data were also collected for 2 years from personal journals kept by the participants. Results indicate the program has impacted staff development; collaboration and teamwork among teachers has improved; and teachers are more creative and willing to share ideas and effectively use school, county, and college resources. This specific cooperative program has strengthened the teaching behaviors of new and experienced teachers, due in part to the continued commitment from the district office. Implementation of continual feedback and practice sessions empowers teachers and provides a cost-effective means of providing in-service activities in individual schools. The response forms and results are included. (LL)

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Nurturing Reflective Teachers:
A Collaborative Effort Between A College and School District

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Paper Prepared for the 45th annual meeting of the
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

February 26, 1993, San Diego, California

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Problems of isolation, student management, non-academic paper work, curriculum guidelines and a myriad of extra curricular activities are not new to educators; they existed at least 75 years ago. In 1946 Harold Spears indicated that current methods of working with teachers were totally inadequate for modern times. A new supervisory method was needed to bring teachers together to work cooperatively and to share new horizons.

A half century later, educators still struggle with reforms, teacher renewal and support. Coaching models (Joyce and Showers, 1987) found that teachers who engaged in peer coaching practiced and developed greater skills as they used and retained strategies. One of the most important actions taken by administrators to ensure the success is to confirm the value of the program since teachers seem reluctant to use the skills learned if they perceive the administrators as 1) lacking in support, 2) having a weak understanding of their peer assistance roles; and 3) cutting the programs (Mims, 1991) This is accomplished by providing teachers with opportunities to use resources and to improve themselves professionally.. Effective use of peer coaching as a reflective practice promotes effective teaching and improves student learning.

This study involves one county school district that decided to enhance the teachers' skills in effective teaching behaviors so they could help new teachers, experienced teachers and themselves become high impact and reflective practioners. In 1990, a county in the metro-Atlanta area collaborated with West Georgia College and the School of Education to certify teachers as teacher support specialists. During the first year, the department of Educational Leadership provided instruction to 25 teachers representing each of the 21 county schools. Twenty-six teachers went through this program the second year, and 24 teachers are currently participating for the third year. This program, offered by the district and college, equips experienced teachers with the skills necessary to nurture teachers, to become more reflective and to share in cooperative learning.

MODEL

Initial training is held every day for two weeks. Participants learn the knowledge base for effective teaching behaviors and reflective practices are discussed and practiced. In addition to these areas, adult learning and teacher development theories assist mentors in understanding themselves and others. Communication skills, data collection techniques, and analysis of teaching strategies are practiced in actual classroom settings. Additional reflection is practiced through taped role playing and micro-teaching. One of the most important components of this program is the continual feedback and support offered by both the school district and college personnel. This support, ongoing throughout an academic year, is provided in monthly seminars. Participants critique their own pre and post conferences, discuss their concerns, frustrations, and most important, their successes. After three years, this program has had a strong impact on staff development in the county. There is improved teamwork and collaboration among teachers at schools and within the district; teachers are more

creative and willing to share ideas, and they effectively use school, county and college resources. The program is cost effective because those teachers who have received the training become in-service human resources and teach specific techniques to others. This allows for more school-wide reflection and teamwork.

For the year-long practicum, participants are assigned student teachers, beginning teachers, new to district teachers or other peer teachers for the full academic year. During this time, the teachers gather data and hold pre and post conferences with their protegees. These conferences are audio taped, with the protegee's consent, and critiqued by the participants. Only the college facilitator hears the tapes and offers feedback on a one-to-one basis. Participants share their analysis of data, concerns and resources at monthly seminars and all information is confidential within the group. Feedback is received from each other and from the college faculty. Participants also keep a journal throughout the year indicating their concerns, successes, and frustrations with peer assistance. This practice allows another means for reflection as a pro-active process.

This program was duplicated during the next two years with the same college facilitator and a new cadre of participants from each of the 21 schools. Support and networking among the participants in the various schools has developed and administrators report significant growth among teachers. The special bonds and trust also assist those schools working on shared governance as the various faculties appear ready to move toward student concerns rather than their own teaching concerns.

ANALYSIS

Data were collected from a questionnaire consisting of ten questions scored on a Likert-Type scale (see Figure 1). Response to the questionnaire indicate the participants' perceptions of the program. The scale ranks responses as Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Moderately Agree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1) and Uncertain (U). The majority of the participants were women and no significant differences appeared in male responses. Other variables were the participants' years of experience and the grade level currently taught.

Frequencies were tabulated to determine the participants' perception of how well the program was working in their school. A comparison of two years' participants' responses were analyzed to determine any significant changes in perceptions since this program has been in existence. Qualitative data were also collected for two years from personal journals kept by the participants. Thoughts were extracted from from the journals and placed into common categories by months to determine any recurring patterns and to assist the facilitator in addressing those like concerns during the most appropriate time in future sessions. The data were analyzed by two other readers trained in singling out critical incidents. There was a positive correlation of their results.

Figure 1

Please circle your response to the following questions

Gender: Female Male

Current teaching level : Elementary Middle School High School

Years of Teaching Experience: 1-4 5-9 10-14 15+

Key: SA- Strongly Agree; **A** Agree; **MA** Moderately Agree; **D**. Disagree; **SD**-Strongly Disagree

	SA	A	MA	D	SD
1. Having a mentor has reduced the amount of time administrators need to spend with individual teachers.	5	4	3	2	1
2. Mentors in your school have encouraged other faculty to gather data for reflective teaching.	5	4	3	2	1
3. This program has increased teacher collaboration and teamwork in your school.	5	4	3	2	1
4. The program assists in socialization of new teachers in your school.	5	4	3	2	1
5. The program assists in improving teacher moral in your school	5	4	3	2	1
6. Utilization of Instructional Resource Teacher has increased.	5	4	3	2	1
7. Differences in teaching in your school during the last years are positive.	5	4	3	2	1
8. The program has increased student achievement at your school.	5	4	3	2	1
9. Teachers are more creative in planning at your school.	5	4	3	2	1
10. Teachers in your school feel less alienated since this program was implemented in your school	5	4	3	2	1

The results of the questionnaire are given for two years. The variables were similar for each group of participants who completed the questionnaire (see table 1).

Table 1 PARTICIPANTS

Level	1990-91	1991-92
Elementary	12	11
Middle school	5	2
High School	3	6
Years of teaching		
1-4	4	3
4-9	10	8
10-14	2	1
15+	5	7

Eighty percent of the participants responding, 1990; 79% response in 1991

The results for each year are presented as frequencies and show some changes in the participants' perceptions of the programs at their schools. Because the participants come from different schools, and their perceptions are subjective, data are discussed in narrative form (see Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2

1990-1991 Results	SA	A	MA	D	SD
1. Having a mentor has reduced the amount of time administrators need to spend with individual teachers.	2	9	5	4	0
2. Mentors in your school have encouraged other faculty to gather data for reflective teaching.	2	5	9	4	0
3. This program has increased teacher collaboration and teamwork in your school.	3	7	11	0	0
4. The program assists in socialization of new teachers in your school.	7	8	4	1	0
5. The program assists in improving teacher morale in your school	2	8	7	3	0
6. Utilization of Instructional Resource Teacher has increased.	2	4	8	1	0
7. Differences in teaching in your school during the last years are positive.	3	11	4	0	0
8. The program has increased student achievement at your school.	1	4	6	5	0
9. Teachers are more creative in planning at your school.	2	9	5	4	0
10. Teachers in your school feel less alienated since this program was implemented in your school.	5	7	6	1	0

Table 3

1991-92 results

	SA	A	MA	D	SD
1. Having a mentor has reduced the amount of time administrators need to spend with individual teachers.	4	6	8	1	0
2. Mentors in your school have encouraged other faculty to gather data for reflective teaching.	3	4	9	3	0
3. This program has increased teacher collaboration and teamwork in your school.	4	10	4	1	0
4. The program assists in socialization of new teachers in your school.	4	11	3	1	0
5. The program assists in improving teacher morale in your school	6	6	5	1	1
6. Utilization of Instructional Resource Teacher has increased.	2	6	7	0	1
7. Differences in teaching in your school during the last years are positive.	1	7	10	0	1
8. The program has increased student achievement at your school.	2	9	5	2	0
9. Teachers are more creative in planning at your school.	1	10	6	2	0
10. Teachers in your school feel less alienated since this program was implemented in your school.	3	8	6	2	0

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Although there were no significant differences in the overall response on the questionnaire, there were differences in the level of teaching and in the years of experience. Teachers in the elementary schools were more inclined to strongly agree or agree that there was increased collaboration and more creativity. High school teachers indicate that they are more reflective and aware of their teaching behaviors, however, because departments are more autonomous, there is less collaboration than in the other levels. Teachers with 1-4 years of teaching experience tend to find more socialization and improvement of teacher morale. Teachers with 10-14 years of experience tend to relate more on a one to one basis within their schools, although they also report that they feel better about their own teaching and are more willing to discuss techniques with another teacher. Some responses were missing for question 6,concerning the use of resource teachers, because high schools do not have faculty in this role. When principals were given the questionnaire, there were significant differences in responses when compared to their years of administrative experience. For

example, those with 1-4 years of experience were more positive than those with 5-9 years of experience (p=.0218) in response to increasing teamwork within the schools. There was significant difference (.0053) between the same groups responding to teachers feeling less alienated. Since most of the administrators with 1-4 years of experience were females in elementary school, they may view support programs more holistically.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

A study of the participants' journals reveal a pattern of like concerns over a 9 month period. The most common categories include frustration with protegee; perceived frustration of protegee; more use of communication skills; comfortable with informal visits; socialization of new teachers; need for personal support; stress of mentor responsibilities; age factors; freely sharing ideas; and difference in subject area and/or distance of classrooms.

Mentors' frustration with their protegee was highest in November with only minor incidents reported in March. Journal reflections mention that their protegees , especially those with new teachers, were feeling comfortable enough to volunteer for extra activities, yet they were over-extending themselves and didn't realize the consequences. This concern appeared more in late October or November. The protegees' frustration with work was highest in October, December, and March. These times correspond to school wide testing and holidays. This may indicate that extra support and ideas should be given to the mentors during these times so they felt more effective in dealing with the protegees' frustrations. The use of communication skills and the necessity to "be less tactful" with their protegees is more evident in November and February. One journal mentions the "unconsciously unskilled" level of the new teacher and the possibility of hurting the teacher's feelings made it difficult to have a meaningful discussion. It was noted that communication skills were most mentioned throughout the journals as the most difficult to master. No one wanted to really say what was on their minds unless the two teachers (mentor and protegee) were both experienced teachers and the feeling was more collaborative.

The need for personal support of mentors was not as high during the second year of the program This may be because the second year participants had a built in support person at their school, one with whom they could relate between feedback seminars. Stress of mentor responsibilities was mentioned most often in the more experienced teachers. They were less egocentric and appear to be more concerned with what to do about other teaching behaviors and student achievement. These comments support Glickman (1991) who mentions that teachers on a high abstract levels think more about the others and student achievement than themselves. Age differences between the protegee and mentor were concerns in the early months of September and October and never discussed again in any of the journals. This was indicated in entries that mentioned effective socialization, rapport established early in the relationship, or that the younger teacher seemed to be placed in a

child/parent situation which didn't seem to last long.

Mentors liked the idea of being able to sharing ideas with each other at seminars and were most happy with the sharing that occurred with their protegees - most often occurring in March and April. The worst situations for mentors appears to be the difference in subject areas and the location of their protegee's classroom. This was especially evident among the middle and high school teachers. Elementary teachers were more concerned with location of the classrooms and expressed a desire to have their protegee located next to them.

Encouraging teachers to be reflective practitioners was the primary goal of this cooperative program. Selected comments from the participants' journals provide evidence that this goal continues to be successful.

"The bimonthly sessions of the mentors have served a two-fold purpose. First they have allowed me to effectively evaluate my role as a teacher, and secondly, I believe that I have become a better listener and better able to adapt to new situations."

"The collection of informal data has not only been fun, it has been more helpful to me than my protegee. Role playing has helped me to reflect and to get through some rough times."

"I have become more sensitive to the professional needs of my colleagues. I no longer feel that what I do is good enough. New insights spring from observing my peers and my reflection provides cues to improve performance as well as a deeper understanding of oneself.:

" I have learned that my perceptions and those of others are often more positive with a change in terminology. I think I am becoming less judgmental but more confident in my performance in the classroom and in working with others."

IMPLICATIONS

This specific cooperative program has strengthened the teaching behaviors of new and experienced teachers. It has been more successful than other programs because of the continued commitment from the district office. The central offices regularly brings together all participants who encourage the new cadre, allow them to share concerns, develop trust, and build a network of human resources. The implementation of continual feedback and practice sessions empowers teachers and provides a cost-effective means of providing in-service activities in individual schools.

Data will be collected in May from the third year participants and from the principals to determine the direction of the fourth year program. In addition, administrators have asked for training in the skills taught during the initial course so they may fully understand the purpose of the program and be in a better position to evaluate the effects on their faculty.